

## INTERPOLATIONS IN THE *MAHĀBHĀRATA*\*

By

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It is now generally accepted that the *Mahābhārata* (Mbh.), originally composed by Vyāsa and then recited, at his instance,<sup>1</sup> by Vaiśampāyana for the benefit of Janamejaya at the latter's snake sacrifice (1.1.8-9; 1.54.1, 17-21), has come down to us not in its original form but with many additions made in it, in the course of its long transmission, first by reciters and later by writers of manuscripts (mss.)<sup>2</sup> at different places and different times. There was a time when scholars were somewhat reluctant to admit interpolations in the Mbh. But now there would hardly be any one who would doubt the presence of much that is spurious in the Mbh. For, if he compares the mss. of different available versions he will come across passages which are found only in a single ms. or a group of mss. but are totally missing in the others.<sup>3</sup> This situation

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1 And, presumably, also in his presence.

2 It cannot be said when exactly the ms. tradition of the Mbh. began. There is absolutely no basis for the Brahmā-Gaṇeśa episode in which the latter is represented as the writer of the text of the Mbh. dictated to him by Vyāsa. The passage is found mainly in the Devanāgarī version as an addition to an already added passage which occurs, besides the Devanāgarī version, also in some mss. of the Southern recension. It does not occur at all in Śāradā, Nepali, Maithili and Bengali versions of the northern recension (cf. Appendix 1.1, pp. 884-885). But even after the ms. tradition began, there is ample evidence to show that the mss. of different places were compared and additions made in the margins or as additional folios. "...a study of critical apparatus shows that there has intervened a long period in the history of the Mahābhārata in which there was a free comparison of manuscripts and extensive mutual borrowings." (V. S. Sukthankar, "Prolegomena" to Ādiparvan, p. LXXIX. The tendency is witnessed even as late as 1931-1933 when the editor of the Mahābhārata, Southern Recension, has quietly inserted stanzas not found in any of the southern mss. utilized by him for his edition but were known to him from some northern version (cf. V. S. S. Prolegomena, pp. LXXXV).

3 "There has been an extraordinary reluctance among scholars to face the fact that the Mahābhārata manuscripts may contain and do contain quantities of spurious matter. But there is no excuse for such reluctance. The critical apparatus of this edition contains a unique record of hundreds of lines which are evidently and unquestionably spurious." V. S. Sukthankar, Prolegomena to Ādiparvan, p. L.

can be explained either by assuming additions of lines and passages in some mss. or omissions of them in others. But since the tendency of those responsible for the transmission of the text has all along been, if necessary, to add passages to the text received by them, but never to omit anything from it, the theory of omission is ruled out. One can adduce various kinds of good reasons in support of the theory of additions, but not one to account for omissions. In such a situation the burden of giving good grounds for admitting omissions must rest on those who favour the theory of omissions.<sup>4</sup>

The number of passages added to the Mbh. text is very large. This kind of large scale fluctuation of the text is not witnessed in any other Sanskrit text, except perhaps the *Rāmāyaṇa*. This, in fact, is as it should be, not only because of the immense popularity of the epic poem, but also because, in my opinion, there is a specific sanction in the Mbh. for the activity of the reciters to make additions to their text. The stanza concerned has been misunderstood. It reads as : *itihāsapurāṇābhyām vedam samupabṛmhayet / bibhety alpaśrutād vedo mām ayam pratariṣyati*<sup>5</sup>// (1.1.204). The stanza is generally taken to mean that one should interpret the Veda with the help of the Itihāsa and the Purāṇa. It is true that some parts of a text like the *Ṛgveda*, especially the so-called *saṁvāda* hymns of the *Ṛgveda*, are better understood with the help of the narratives found in such post-Ṛgvedic texts as the *Brāhmaṇas*, the *Nirukta*, the *Bṛhaddevatā* and also in the post-Vedic texts like the *Mahābhārata*. But that has nothing to do with the stanza just cited. In the first instance the root *bṛm-* or *samupabṛm-* does not mean 'to interpret'. It means 'to enlarge, to make strong'. And, secondly, the word *Veda* of this stanza does not refer to a text like the *Ṛgveda*. What it really refers to is made clear by the very next stanza which begins as : *kārṣṇam vedam imam vidvāṇ śrāvayitvārtham aśnute* 'by reciting this Veda composed by Kṛṣṇa (Dvaipāyana) one achieves one's purpose.' Hence the word *veda* of the preceding stanza does not refer to a text like the *Ṛgveda*, but to the Veda of Kṛṣṇa Dvaipāyana, i.e. the *Mahābhārata*.<sup>6</sup> The stanza under

4 "I should now go so far as to assert that probably not one of the some fifty MSS. I have studied for Book 2, nor any of their geneological ancestors, ever *deliberately or intentionally* omitted a single line of the text." (F. Edgerton, Introduction to Sabhāparvan, p. XXXIV. Also cf. the following remark of V. S. Sukthankar, "And it is fair to demand of a person who alleges the authenticity of such one-recension passages why the rival recension does not contain it." (Prolegomena to Ādi, p. XCVI.)

5 v. l. *prahariṣyati*.

6 That the Mbh. was looked upon as a Veda is shown by another passage : *vedān adhyāpayām āsa mahābhāratapañcamān* 1.57.74.



discussion therefore means that one should expand the Veda, i.e. the Mbh. by adding to it the narratives from the Itihāsa and the Purāṇa (and one who is well-versed (*vidvān*) can easily do that). The Veda is afraid that a person with little knowledge would easily cross over it, i.e. he would complete the reading of the text soon if, owing to his little knowledge, he was not able to expand his text by means of additions.<sup>7</sup>

In such a situation it would have been a matter of great surprise if a popular text like the Mbh. which was orally transmitted for many centuries was not burdened with many additions.<sup>8</sup> The critical edition of the text now lays bare all spurious matter which could be easily set aside on the objective evidence of the manuscripts. The guiding principle that was adopted for this initial task of sifting was not to admit any passage, short or long, in the constituted text if that was not uniformly documented in all the versions of the Northern and the Southern recension.<sup>9</sup> As a corollary, the editors were bound to admit into the constituted text a passage which was uniformly documented in all the versions even when that meant admitting into the text stanzas which contradicted each other.<sup>10</sup> The editors in such cases have noted such contradictions and told the readers that they are the results of conflation of divergent versions of the same event. The reciters in their anxiety to have into their text anything known to them did not much care for the contradictions involved in the process. The editors therefore have warned the readers that, although they have succeeded in removing much spurious matter, their text remains still burdened with much which could equally be spurious. They are in no sense presenting to the readers the 'original' Mbh. attributed to Vyāsa and recited by Vaiśampāyana, not even the version that was narrated by Sūta Ugrasravas in the Naimiṣa forest to the sages assembled there for the long sacrificial session of Śaunaka.<sup>11</sup>

7 Cf. in this connection the following remark of V. S. Sukthankar : "No one in the past found the epic text too long. Far from it. It was perhaps not long enough." Prolegomena to Ādi, p. LII.

8 Cf. the proud statement contained in the Mbh. *yad ihāsti tad anyatra yan nehāsti na tat kvacit* (1. 56. 33).

9 The only exception made by the General Editor was to print in the text the auspicious *mantra* : *nārāyaṇaṁ namaskṛtya* etc. at the beginning of only the Ādiparvan. This stanza is totally missing in the entire Southern recension and therefore is considered spurious.

10 For the principles adopted for preparing the constituted text, see V. S. Sukthankar, Prolegomena to Ādi, pp. LXXXVI ff.

11 Mbh. 1.1.1-19; 1.4. 1-11; 1. 53. 27-36. For V. S. Sukthankar's remarks see Prolegomena to Ādi, p. CIII.

The task of removing the spurious matter that still remains in the critically constituted text and bringing it as close as possible to the oldest version of the Mbh. has been left by them to future students of the text.<sup>12</sup> For, arriving at the truly 'original' text of Vyāsa is well nigh impossible.

What I propose to do this evening is to give some examples of different kinds of interpolations in the Mbh. :

1. Those revealed by ms. evidence and set aside by the editors,<sup>13</sup>
2. those that are not revealed by ms. evidence and hence form part of the constituted text but are quite obvious due to contradictions in consecutive stanzas,<sup>14</sup> and
3. those revealed either by contradictions that are not so obvious because they are not found in consecutive passages but are found in the text as a whole, or by the criterion of intrinsic probability.<sup>15</sup>

I begin with some examples of the **first** kind, i.e. those which have been already characterized as interpolations and do not occur in the text of critical editions. Although they have been long recognized as interpolations, I mention them again because they are so deeply impressed on the popular mind that even after some fifty to sixty years have passed since the publication of the *parvans* in which they are found,<sup>16</sup> they still continue to haunt the public mind.

One such example is related to the *svayamvara* of Draupadī. It is popularly believed that when Karna lifted the bow and was about to shoot the arrow to hit the target, Draupadī loudly declared that she would not choose a *sūta* for her husband : *dr̥ṣṭvā taṁ draupadī vākyam uccair jagāda nāhaṁ varayāmi sūtam* 1.1827\*, p.725). On hearing it, Karna threw down the bow and, downcast, retired from the contest.

<sup>12</sup> This task has been characterized as the application of "higher criticism" to the text. See F. Edgerton, Introduction to Sabhā-parvan, p. XXXIII.

<sup>13</sup> They are found in the footnotes or appendices to the critical editions; some of them have been discussed by the editors.

<sup>14</sup> These too have been pointed out by the editors in their introductions to respective *parvans*.

<sup>15</sup> These have not been noted as spurious so far.

<sup>16</sup> Ādiparvan was published in 1933, Āraṇyaka in 1943, and Droṇa in 1958. The examples given below are from these *parvans*.



This stanza does not occur at all in the entire Southern recension, and among the versions of the Northern recension, it does not occur in the Kashmiri, Maithili and Bengali versions. It is found only in four Devanāgarī mss. (out of a total fourteen used for the critical edition), and one (out of three) Nepali ms. It is therefore clearly a very late addition to the text. Moreover, its spurious nature is revealed also by other considerations. It contradicts certain other passages in the epic. In the first instance, Karna attended the *svayamvara* along with Duryodhana and other Kurus, because he must have been invited for it by Drupada. That means he was not considered unqualified by Drupada to take part in the contest (*duryodhanapurogāś ca sakarṇāḥ kuravo nrpa... samupāgaman* 1.176.14; *karṇena sahitā vīrās tvadartham samupāgatāḥ* 1.77.4). Next, Yudhiṣṭhira told the Purohita of Drupada that when the *paṇa* for the *svayamvara* was declared, no restriction was mentioned regarding the *varṇa*, *gotra*, family, or vocation of the suitor (*na tatra varṇeṣu kṛtā vivakṣā na jīvaśilpe na kule na gotre* 1. 85.23). That meant that Draupadī was just *vīryaśulkā* and hence she could not lay down any condition. But most important of all, Karna is specifically mentioned in a stanza which names a few kings who tried their hand at the bow, but had failed (*yat karṇaśalyapramukhaiḥ pāṛthivair lokaviśrutaiḥ / nānataṁ balavadbhir hi dhanurvedaparāyaṇaiḥ* // 1.179.4). Hence, if Karna had once tried his hand and had failed there was no question of his trying again and Draupadī objecting to it. The passage is thus a clear addition to the received text.<sup>17</sup>

The second instance is from the account of the killing of Jayadratha. Again, it is popularly believed that in order to deceive Jayadratha, Kṛṣṇa made use of some kind of device to conceal the sun and produce the impression of sunset. The Southern recension as a whole refers to this device vaguely as *upāya* (*srakrṣyāmy aham upāyam tam ādityasyāpavāraṇe* 7. 1009\*.6). This *upāya* is further made clear in the Telugu version and in most of the Grantha manuscripts but it does not occur at all in the Malayalam version of the Southern recension. According to the additional information provided by the Telugu and the Grantha versions, Kṛṣṇa ordered his *sudarśana cakra* to cover the sun with darkness and produce the impression of sunset (*astam gatam ivādityam tamasā chādayeti vai* 7.1010\*). On the other hand, in the north, only the Bengali and the Devanāgarī versions, tell us that Kṛṣṇa used some kind of *yoga* to cover the sun (*yogam atra vidhāsyāmi*

17 For the comments of V. S. Sukthankar on this subject see Prolegomena to Ādi, p. LXI.

*sūryasyāvarāṇaṁ prati* 7. App. 16. 5, 12-14). The references to Kṛṣṇa's intervention are, thus, not only not found in all the versions (it is absent in any form in the Kashmiri version<sup>18</sup>), but also that they are not uniform. The conclusion about their spurious nature arrived at on the basis of the manuscript evidence is confirmed by the fact that these passages contradict the account of Jayadratha's killing given in other stanzas which are uniformly found in all the versions. Those stanzas tell us that Arjuna succeeded in defeating all heroes who tried to obstruct his way to Jayadratha. He engaged Jayadratha in a duel when advancing towards the west, the sun, though was clearly visible in the sky. The duel lasted for some time in which Arjuna felled down the opponent's flagstaff and killed his charioteer. By this time the sun had further advanced to the west. Hence, Kṛṣṇa advised Arjuna not to waste any more time but kill Jayadratha straightaway. Arjuna acted on Kṛṣṇa's advice and with his very next arrow cut off the head of Jayadratha. There was still some time left before the sunset, so that the army of the Pāṇḍavas could attack Droṇa (*tataḥ pravavṛte rājann astam gacchati bhāskare / droṇasya somakaiḥ sārddham saṁgrāmo lomaharṣaṇaḥ* 7.121.45). Since Arjuna had thus enough time at his disposal to kill Jayadratha before sunset, there was no question of Kṛṣṇa using his *yoga* or any other device (*upāya*) like *sudarśana cakra* to cover the sun.

To give just one more example of this nature, I may recall the incident in which Urvaśī is said to have approached Arjuna during his stay in heaven. The incident is reported in the entire southern recension and only in the Bengali and the Devanāgarī versions of the north, but is absent in the Kashmiri version. We are told that once Indra had noticed Arjuna paying special attention to Urvaśī (*pārthasya cakṣur urvaśyām saktam vijñāya vāsāvaḥ*). Hence he asked Citrasena to tell Urvaśī to pay a visit to Arjuna one evening. Accordingly she went to Arjuna but he refused to be attracted by her. Enraged, she cursed Arjuna to live like a eunuch. She did not specify the duration of the effect of her curse. When the incident was reported to Indra, he consoled Arjuna by saying that the curse would help him to live like a Bṛhannaḍā during his term of *ajñātavāsa*. Thus it was Indra who restricted the effect of the curse to one year (3. App. I. no. 6. pp. 1047-1053).

This incident also contradicts a later statement by Arjuna in the Virāṭaparvan. According to it Arjuna had revealed to Uttara that although he

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<sup>18</sup> The Nepali and the Maithili versions of the Droṇa parvan are not available.



was pretending to be a eunuch, he was really not so. He was only practising a *vrata* for a year (*saṁvatsaram idaṁ vratam / carāmi brahmacaryam vai satyam etad bravīmi te// nāsmi klībo mahābāho....*, 4. 40.12-13).

The whole Urvaśī incident is very strange. Instead of being pleased with Arjuna for his self-control and reward him, Urvaśī cursed him. This is clearly an example of an early instance of the motif of scorned love which is found in the Buddhist and the Jain narrative literature and then also in later Brahmanical literature.<sup>19</sup>

There are many examples of interpolations of this type which are thus excluded from the constituted text on the basis of manuscript evidence. Not all of them, however, involve internal contradictions as in the above examples. To give only one example of this nature, one may recall the incident of the sage Durvāsas reported in the *Āraṇyaka-parvan*. We are told that the sage Durvāsas was sent, along with his one thousand disciples, to the Pāṇḍavas by Duryodhana. The sage was to ask for food when Draupadī had cleansed her *sthālī*, which provided food as desired, and kept it aside. She could not then serve food to Durvāsas and his pupils. Duryodhana anticipated that the enraged sage would curse the Pāṇḍavas. However, Kṛṣṇa came to the rescue of the Pāṇḍavas. Durvāsas and his disciples, when they were bathing in the river, felt satiated and, afraid of inviting the wrath of Yudhiṣṭhira, they all fled. The incident is reported in a lengthy passage found only in a few Devanāgarī mss. (including that of Nīlakaṇṭha and Caturbhuja) and in one Grantha ms. It is absent in all other versions.<sup>20</sup>

We may now turn to the **second** kind of interpolations which are admitted into the constituted text since they occur uniformly without exception in all the versions of the Mbh.

<sup>19</sup> For the Mbh. incident, see V. S. Sukthankar's Introduction to *Āraṇyakaparvan*, pp. XIX-XXI. For the motif of scorned love, see M. Bloomfield, *Tr. Proc. Am. Philol. Ass.* 54 (1923), pp. 141-167. Bloomfield's examples from the Mbh. 1. 3. 85 ff., 1.97, and 13.19 (p. 145) do not belong here. He does not mention the Urvaśī episode. For a detailed discussion of the motif, see Tawney-Penzer, *The Ocean of Story*, Vol. II. pp. 120-124, Vol. IV. pp. 104-107.

<sup>20</sup> 3. App. I. 25 (pp. 1080-1084); also a very short version of ten lines in only one Devanāgarī ms. App. I.30 (p. 1087). For V. S. Sukthankar's observations, see Introduction to *Āraṇyaka*, p. XXV.

An example of an interpolation revealed due to contradiction in two consecutive stanzas occurs in the Sabhāparvan. After the game of dice, Duryodhana sent his messenger to Draupadī to take her to the *dāsīs* of the Kauravas to do menial work (2.59.1; 2.60.4). When Draupadī refused and instead raised the question about her status as a *dāsī*, Duryodhana asked the same messenger to go to her again this time to bring her to the *sabhā* to get the answer to her question. The messenger accordingly went to her and told her Duryodhana's message. Draupadī apparently was in no mood to act according to Duryodhana's wish. Now instead of hearing about a clear refusal by Draupadī and the messenger's return to the *sabhā* without her, what we actually hear in a couple of stanzas is that Yudhiṣṭhira having come to know what Duryodhana desired sent a messenger, acceptable to Draupadī, and she, without hesitation, came to the assembly and stood before her father-in-law (*sabhām āgamyā pāñcālī śvaśurasyāgrato 'bhavat* (2.60.15). And in spite of the fact that Draupadī was then already present in the assembly, to our surprise, we are informed once again that Duryodhana asked his messenger to go to Draupadī to get her to the *sabhā*! (*ihaiva tām ānaya prātikāmin pratyakṣam asyāḥ kuravo bruvantu* 2.60.16). There is thus a contradiction between two passages. If the one has place in the text, the other should not. And yet the editor has admitted both the passages of contradictory reports in the constituted text since they occur uniformly in all the versions of the epic.<sup>21</sup> In this case, it may be noted, that the contradiction is the result not of the inventor's adding something of his own, but it is due to the fact that the narrator has introduced into his version a couple of stanzas from an altogether different version of the incident. It is a case of conflation of two different reports.<sup>22</sup>

Another similar example is from the Ādiparvan. It is usually believed that Mādrī committed *satī* after the death of Pāṇḍu. In support of this belief we have a specific statement in the Mbh. which occurs without exception in all the versions and hence forms part of the constituted text. That statement tells us very clearly that Mādrī mounted the funeral pyre of Pāṇḍu and burnt herself with him. (*tām citāgatam ājñāya vaiśvānaramukhe hutam / praviṣṭā pāvakaṁ mādri hitvā jīvitam ātmanaḥ* 1.117.28; also 1.116.31). However, it is not so well known that immediately after this stanza we have another one which also occurs in all the versions and hence forms part of the constituted

21 For the observations of F. Edgerton see his Introduction to the Sabhā, pp. XXXI-XXXII.

22 It may be noted that in the version according to which Draupadī came to the *sabhā* of her own accord, there is no room for her harassment by Duṣṣāsana as is found in the well known version.



text. The latter stanza directly contradicts what is said in the preceding stanza. According to this stanza the sages who, after the death of Pāṇḍu, brought Kuntī and the young Pāṇḍavas to Hāstinapura, also brought with them the two dead bodies of Pāṇḍu and Mādri. They handed them over to the elders of the Kauravas and asked them to perform the due funeral rites (*ime tayoh śarīre dve... pretakārye ca nirvṛtte pitṛmedham mahāyaśāḥ/ labhatām... pāṇḍuḥ.../ 1.117.30-31*). Then, in the following *adhyāya* (1.118) we have a detailed description of the cremation of Pāṇḍu and Mādri. Both these accounts could not be true at the same time. Either Pāṇḍu was cremated on the Śataśṛṅga mountain and Mādri mounted the funeral pyre, or cremation did not take place and the dead bodies were brought to Hāstinapura. Nīlakaṇṭha's feeble attempt to remove the contradiction by interpreting *śarīra* 'body' as *asthi* 'bone' is not convincing. Sukthankar, following Hopkins, has already expressed his dissatisfaction with Nīlakaṇṭha's explanation.<sup>23</sup> Clearly here, as in the above case, we have conflation of two different accounts of the same incident. The interpolator while borrowing stanzas from a different account and inserting them in his own has shown scant regard for the contradiction his interference with the received text involved.<sup>24</sup>

We shall now consider the **third** kind of interpolations, viz. such as are revealed to be of doubtful nature due to internal contradiction or due to the criterion of intrinsic probability. The contradictions, however, are not obvious since they do not occur in the consecutive passages<sup>25</sup> but are revealed by the study of different *Adhyāyas* in different *parvans*.

One example of such interpolation is related to the famous incident of the vow of Bhīma to break the thigh of Duryodhana in the great war (2. 63. 14) and the curse of the sage Maitreya to the same effect (3. 11. 34). They, no doubt, occur in all the versions, but their spurious nature is revealed by the fact that in the entire account of the great war, no one, not even Bhīma and Duryodhana, at any stage shows any awareness of either the vow or the curse.

23 In addition to what Sukthankar has said (*Prolegomena to Ādi*, pp. LXXXVII), I have given some more arguments for not accepting Nīlakaṇṭha's interpretation, cf. *Proceedings of the National Seminar on Living Customs and their Ancient Indian Sources*, Pune 1991, pp. 159-171.

24 Sukthankar does not express his opinion on which of the two accounts could be the original one. I have tried to show, on the basis of internal and external evidence, that the stanzas related to *satī* are spurious, cf. *Madhuvidyā* (M. A. Mehendale : *Collected Papers*, 2001, pp. 481-482).

25 As, for example, in the interpolations discussed above of the second type.

Many warriors on the side of the Pāṇḍavas, during the first eighteen days of war, fought with Duryodhana with bow and arrows and no one, according to the war report, had tried to spare him simply because his thigh was to be broken by Bhīma with *gadā*. In fact, Arjuna on two occasions agreed to kill Duryodhana with his *arrows*. The first occasion arose when Duryodhana tried to check Arjuna's advance towards Jayadratha. Kṛṣṇa asked Arjuna to kill Duryodhana and remove the very root of all wickedness (7.77.7, 10, 13, 17-18). Arjuna readily agreed to cut off the head of Duryodhana (*chindyām mūrdhānam āhave* 7.77.20). Later, after the fall of Śalya, Arjuna once again agreed to kill Duryodhana as suggested by Kṛṣṇa (9.26.8-9; 23-24). That Arjuna, on both those occasions did not succeed in killing Duryodhana for one reason or the other is a different matter. The point is, if Kṛṣṇa and Arjuna had known about the vow and the curse, how could Kṛṣṇa suggest to kill Duryodhana and how could Arjuna agree to it? If Arjuna had succeeded in cutting off the *head* of Duryodhana with his *arrow*, there would have been no chance for Bhīma to fulfil his vow to break the thigh with *gadā*, nor for the curse of Maitreya to prove true.

Next, let us see if Yudhiṣṭhira at any stage shows awareness of the vow or the curse. He too disappoints us. When Yudhiṣṭhira challenged Duryodhana to come out of the pond and face the Pāṇḍavas, he permitted him not only to fight with the weapon of his choice but also with any one of the Pāṇḍavas, not necessarily Bhīma. If Duryodhana chose, Yudhiṣṭhira offered to fight with him (9.31.24-25). All this is very stange. If Bhīma had vowed to break the thigh, all that Yudhiṣṭhira should have done is to ask Duryodhana to come out of the pond and have a *gadāyuddha* with Bhīma.

Coming to Draupadī, we do not find her making a reference to Bhīma's vow. When Kṛṣṇa was to leave for Hāstinapura to make a final bid to avoid the war, she did not approve of his mission. She wanted a war in which she could see the uprooted arm of Duḥśāsana lying on the ground smeared with dust. (*duḥśāsanabhujam śyāmaṁ samchinnaṁ pāmsugunṭhitam / yady aham taṁ na paśyāmi kā śāntir hrdayasya me* // 5.80.39). But there is no similar word from her about the hated thigh of Duryodhana.

Finally, we note that neither Bhīma nor Duryodhana, the two most important characters directly concerned with the vow and the curse, shows any knowledge of them.



As to Bhīma, to begin with, let us note that surprisingly he too pleaded with Kṛṣṇa to see if the war with the Kauravas could be avoided. How could Bhīma do that if he had vowed to break the thigh in the war? But apart from it, during the long reporting of the war lasting for eighteen days he is never shown eager to challenge Duryodhana for a duel with *gadā* to enable him to fulfil his vow. And when an occasion arose when he could have at least mentioned his vow, he did not do that. When Bhīma killed Duḥśāsana and fulfilled his vow concerning him, he declared that on that very day he would cut the limbs of Duryodhana like that of a sacrificial animal and give its offerings (*adyaiva dāsyāmy aparaṁ dvitīyaṁ duryodhanam yajñapaśuṁ viśasya* 8.61.16). Instead of saying that, why did he not declare that on that very day he would break Duryodhana's thigh to fulfil his second vow?<sup>26</sup> In the description of the *gadāyuddha* proper, which is fairly long (9.56.1-67), there is nothing to suggest that Bhīma was looking for an opportunity to break his opponent's thigh. On the contrary he, as well as his opponent, was fighting strictly according to the rules. If one of them fell on the ground, the other did not rush to take undue advantage of the situation (as for instance the son of Duḥśāsana did when Abhimanyu fell on the ground 7.48.11-12), but allowed his opponent to stand up again to continue the fight.

At one stage, however, Bhīma lost his armour due to Duryodhana's hit. From that point onwards the situation became very grave for Bhīma. Noticing the danger Bhīma faced, Kṛṣṇa thought it fit to intervene. He told Arjuna, sitting by his side, that if Bhīma continued to fight as he did till that point strictly following the rules of the duel, there was absolutely no chance for him to win. Only if Bhīma took recourse to some unlawful move, he could kill Duryodhana (*bhīmasenas tu dharmeṇa yudhyamāno na jeṣyati/ anyāyena tu yudhyan vai hanyād eṣa suyodhanam* 9. 57. 4, 8, 17). What that unlawful move (*anyāya*) should be, Kṛṣṇa did not specify. It was Arjuna who, acting on Kṛṣṇa's advice, did it. By stroking his own thigh with his hand, he suggested to Bhīma to hit his *gadā* at Duryodhana's thigh. In the given situation, that was probably the only kind of unjust act which Arjuna could suggest to Bhīma without any one else noticing it. Bhīma understood the hint correctly and immediately after that when he got the opportunity he hurled his *gadā* at Duryodhana's thigh who, to be sure, never expected Bhīma to do anything of the sort. As a result, Duryodhana

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26 It may also be noted that on occasions Bhīma spoke of killing Duryodhana with his *gadā* but never of breaking his thigh (5. 72. 13-14).

fell on the ground without any possibility of getting up again to continue the fight.

This is how the duel between Bhīma and Duryodhana came to an end. Bhīma hurled his mace at Duryodhana's thigh, neither because he had vowed to do that, nor because that was how Maitreya had cursed Duryodhana, but because there was no other option left for him. The incidents of the vow and the curse are therefore to be judged as later additions inserted in the epic obviously to absolve Bhīma from the guilt of doing an improper act.<sup>27</sup>

Duryodhana, the victim of the unjust act, too does not seem to be aware of the vow or the curse. On one occasion, while sending a message to the Pāṇḍavas through Śakuni's son Ulūka, he challenged Bhīma to fulfil his vow regarding Duḥśāsana, but made no reference at all to the other vow of breaking the thigh (*duḥśāsanrya rudhiram pīyatām yadi śakyate* 5.157.17; 5.158.10). This is very strange if Duryodhana had any knowledge about the vow.

The Pāṇḍavas too in their spirited reply assured Duryodhana that Bhīma would most certainly drink the blood of Duḥśāsana but, strangely, they did not say a word about the vow of breaking the thigh (*duḥśāsanasya rudhiram pītām ity avadhāryatām* 5. 159.12).

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27 It has been said above that none of the characters shows any awareness of the vow or the curse. There is however one exception. Kṛṣṇa on two occasions made mention of them. In the first instance, after he drew Arjuna's attention to the fact that Bhīma had no option but to take recourse to some unlawful act he, as an afterthought, mentioned that Bhīma had vowed to break Duryodhana's thigh (*pratijñātaṁ tu bhīmena dyūtakāle dhanamjaya / ūrū bhetsyāmi te saṁkhye gadayeti suyodhanam* // 9.57.6). But even after that, he pointed out that if Bhīma were to continue to fight according to the rules and relying on his strength, Yudhiṣṭhira would be placed in an adverse situation (*yady eṣa balam āsthāya nyāyena prahariṣyati/viṣamasthas tato rājā bhaviṣyati yudhiṣṭhiraḥ* // 9.57.8). This means that Kṛṣṇa would have certainly preferred if Bhīma could come out victorious without doing anything wrong. But since that was not possible he should fulfil his vow! This is very strange. And more important is the fact that if at all Bhīma had taken the vow, it would not have been necessary to remind him about it. The next occasion arose when, after the fall of Duryodhana, the enraged Balarāma rushed towards Bhīma. While trying to pacify his anger Kṛṣṇa reminded Balarāma of the vow of Bhīma, and, in addition, mentioned also the curse of Maitreya (which he did not do on the earlier occasion) (*suyodhanasya gadayā bhāṅktāsmi ūrū mahāhave / iti pūrvam pratijñātaṁ bhīmena hi sabhātale // maitreyaṇābhīṣaptaś ca pūrvam eva maharṣiṇā / ūrū bhetsyati te bhīmo gadayati paramtapa* // 9.59.14-15, 24). Kṛṣṇa further pointed out to Balarāma that the Pāṇḍavas were bound to them by nuptial and friendly ties (9.59.16). This additional pleading becomes irrelevant if the vow and the curse were facts. The secondary nature of these verses is quite clear.



In the actual duel that occurred, Duryodhana is never shown as taking extra care to guard his thighs. In fact, he had no need to do that since Bhīma was fighting all along according to the rules which meant the part of his body below the navel was safe. That must be the reason why he jumped up in the sky in order to avoid Bhīma's final and fatal hit. He was unaware that in the meantime Bhīma had changed his mind and had decided to break the rules to bring his opponent down. His jumping up and thereby exposing the thighs gave a splendid opportunity to Bhīma which he did not miss. He hurled his mace aiming at the exposed thighs and broke them.

Since no one involved in the war ever knew of the vow or the curse, the two incidents are incompatible with the rest of the account in the Mbh. They have therefore to be judged as interpolations invented by the narrator and added to his text.

Another interpolation, not noticed so far, occurs in the Āśvamedhika parvan (14.59-60). After the war, Kṛṣṇa returned to Dvārakā. Vasudeva asked Kṛṣṇa to give him a brief account of the war telling him exactly what had happened. Kṛṣṇa was best qualified to do that since he was a witness to the war incidents and was also famous for his true speech (*tvam hi pratyakṣadarśi ca kāryajñaś ca mahābhujā tasmāt prabrūhi saṁgrāmam yāthātathyena me 'nagha*// 14. 59. 2; *nanu tvam puṇḍarikākṣa satyavāg bhuvi viśrutaḥ* 14. 60. 7). Kṛṣṇa's report is extremely short making up some 56 stanzas (14. 59. 6-35; 14. 60. 16-41). It is surprising to notice certain glaring discrepancies between his brief account and the earlier detailed account of Saṁjaya.<sup>28</sup>

The first discrepancy in Kṛṣṇa's account concerns the generals who led the Pāṇḍava army during the eighteen days of war. According to Saṁjaya, it was Dhṛṣṭadyumna who alone led the Pāṇḍava army for all the eighteen days. The Kauravas, however, had to change their generals one after the other. Surprisingly, according to Kṛṣṇa, the Pāṇḍavas too changed their generals to correspond to the changes made by their opponents. Thus, the Pāṇḍavas had four generals Śikhaṇḍin, Dhṛṣṭadyumna, Arjuna and Yudhiṣṭhira (14. 59. 9, 15, 20, 23). This deviation is clearly of a secondary nature since it shows

28 Both Kṛṣṇa and Saṁjaya could not have been witnesses to all the incidents of the war. Some they saw, others they heard from other heroes or from war reporters. Hence it would not be very strange if the discrepancies in the two accounts were of a minor nature. But that is not the case.

advance knowledge on the part of the Pāṇḍavas regarding their heroes who were to kill their opposite numbers and hence made them generals.

The next deviation is related to the death of Droṇa. Kṛṣṇa told Vasudeva that Droṇa was overpowered by Dhṛṣṭadyumna since he was extremely tired (*tato droṇaḥ pariśrānto dhṛṣṭadyumnavāśaṁ gataḥ* 14.59.18). This is very different from what Saṁjaya reported to Dhṛtarāṣṭra. According to that report, Dhṛṣṭadyumna overpowered Droṇa only when he laid down his arms and not because he was tired (7. 165. 34-37, 52-54).<sup>29</sup>

A similar deviation is related to the fall of Karna. Kṛṣṇa grossly underrated Karna's valour when he said that Karna died like a moth when it came in contact with fire (*tataḥ pārthaṁ samāsādyā patamga iva pāvakaṁ/ pañcatvam agamat saurir...* 14. 59. 21). As a matter of fact, Karna fought very bravely even after his wheel got stuck in a crevice. (8. 66. 45-59; 8. 67. 8-14). In that short-lived final duel, Kṛṣṇa once observed that Karna as though swallowed Arjuna's arrows (*rādheyo grasate śarān* 8. 66. 52) and also that Arjuna was afflicted by the arrows of Karna (*karṇāstreṇābhipīditam* 8. 66. 57). Certainly a moth does not do that to a flame of fire!

Kṛṣṇa's account of the fall of Duryodhana has two deviations when compared to that of Saṁjaya. In the first instance, he told Vasudeva that when Duryodhana left the battlefield Bhīma ran after him and saw him hiding himself in a lake (*tam anvadhāvat bhīmasenaḥ... hrade... salilasthaṁ dadarśa ha* 14. 59. 26-27). According to Saṁjaya's account, nobody knew where Duryodhana was and it was Bhīma's hunters who gave Pāṇḍavas information about his hiding in a lake (9. 28. 25, 49-52; 9. 29. 5-6, 22-42). Secondly, Kṛṣṇa told Vasudeva that Bhīma killed Duryodhana by his valour. He made no mention of Bhīma violating the rules of *gadāyuddha* and breaking the thighs of Duryodhana (*tataḥ sa nihato rājā... bhīmasenena vikramya* 14. 59. 30).<sup>30</sup>

Finally, we may note the deviation in Kṛṣṇa's reporting of the death of Abhimanyu. Kṛṣṇa told Vasudeva that Abhimanyu was tired out by Droṇa and Karna and that was why he was overpowered by the son of

<sup>29</sup> If Kṛṣṇa had desired to be brief and yet close to Saṁjaya's account he could have said *nyastaśastraḥ* instead of *pariśrāntaḥ*.

<sup>30</sup> Even if Kṛṣṇa did not want to go into the details, he could have used the word *vyutkrāmya*, instead of *vikramya*, to indicate the violation of the rules.



Duṣśāsana (14. 60. 17, 20). According to Saṁjaya's account, Abhimanyu could have been certainly tired, but that was not because of Droṇa and Karṇa but because he had to fight with a number heroes before he encountered the son of Duṣśāsana. And just before the final dual, he had to face, not just Droṇa and Karṇa, but a group of six heroes of whom Droṇa and Karṇa were two (7. 47. 31-38; 7. 48. 21).<sup>31</sup>

Kṛṣṇa made no mention of Arjuna's vow to kill Jayadratha. Instead, he told Vasudeva that Kuntī consoled Subhadrā lamenting her son's death and that she also arranged for Abhimanyu's *śrāddha*. This cannot be true if we follow Saṁjaya's account. During the war, Kuntī was all along at Hāstinapura and not in the camp of the Pāṇḍavas to be able to console Subhadrā. It was Kṛṣṇa who consoled Subhadrā. There is also no mention of the *śrāddha* of Abhimanyu as, in fact, there is no mention of any other *śrāddha* during the war in Saṁjaya's account.

All these deviations are such as could not have been invented by the narrator. They seem to have been taken over from an account of the war different in many points from that of Vaiśampāyana.

A **third** instance of an interpolation which also points to quite a different narration of the Mbh. from the one known to us is related to the basic incident of the epic narrative viz. the game of dice. One such variation was already noticed above. It concerned Draupadī's arrival in the *sabhā* – did she go there of her own accord or was she forced to go by Duṣśāsana? (p. 8).

There is another variation in the narration of the game of dice which has not been noticed so far. How did Yudhiṣṭhira lose the Pāṇḍavas in the game?

According to the known version, Yudhiṣṭhira staked his four brothers, one after the other, and then staked himself. The declaration of each stake was immediately followed by the game related to it. Yudhiṣṭhira lost all those five games and thus all the Pāṇḍavas became *dāsas* (2. 58. 11-28).

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31 There was certainly a brief consultation between Droṇa and Karṇa before Abhimanyu had to face the six heroes 7. 47. 26-30. But that does not mean that only those two tired Abhimanyu out.

Then Śakuni, in two stanzas 2.58. 29 and 31, suggested to Yudhiṣṭhira to stake Draupadī. These two stanzas should have occurred consecutively one after the other, but in the available text we find a stanza inserted between the two (2.58.30) which not only breaks the smooth narration of the event but is also out of the context. It tells us that Śakuni, the skilled gambler, won the Pāṇḍavas all of whom stood as stakes by throwing dice separately for each one of them (*evam uktvā<sup>32</sup> matākṣas tān glahe sarvān avasthitān / prājayaḥ lokavīrān ākṣepeṇa prthak prthak*). This information is not only superfluous because it tells us what has been already told before, but its import gives quite a different account of the manner by which the Pāṇḍavas were staked and lost.

The known account has been told above. According to this stanza, however first only the stakes of all the Pāṇḍavas were declared one after the other and when this declaration of all the five stakes was over, Śakuni played five different games one after the other related to those stakes. In the known account the sequence of the events was : the declaration of a stake immediately followed by the game related to it; according to the stanza 2.58.30 the sequence was : first the the declaration of all five stakes and then the five games related to them.

The stanza 2.58.30 is therefor clearly a later addition made by the narrator by borrowing it from some different account of the game of dice.

But the most startling variation is related to the initiative taken by Yudhiṣṭhira for the game of dice. This startling information is found at two places : in the second Adhyāya of the Udyogaparvan and in the twenty-eighth Adhyāya of the Āraṇyakaparvan. We are told in the Udyogaparvan that at a meeting held in the court of Virāṭa, Kṛṣṇa suggested to send a messenger to the Kauravas to find out what their intention was. Balarāma agreed, but added that as far as the game of dice was concerned it was all Yudhiṣṭhira's doing and no blame attached to Śakuni. It was Yudhiṣṭhira who insisted on playing dice when all the senior Kurus and friends present in the Sabhā tried to dissuade him. Although himself not an expert player (*atajjñah*), he dared challenge Śakuni who was known for his skill with the dice (*matākṣah*). Yudhiṣṭhira could have challenged any other gambler present in the Sabhā (*durodarās tatra sahasraśo 'nye*). And on top of that all he did not stop at any stage during

32 The words *evam uktvā* which occur at the beginning of the stanza also show that it stands out of the context. What follows in the stanza has nothing to do with what Śakuni had said in the preceding stanza 29.



the game though he was constantly losing, but went on to play till the bitter end. Thus from the beginning of the end the entire blame lay at the doors of Yudhiṣṭhira and no to blame came to Śakuni (*tatrāparādhō śakuner na kaś cit* 5.2. 9-11).

The above account presents to us quite a different image of Yudhiṣṭhira. According to the known account, the game was not played on Yudhiṣṭhira's initiative. It was Dhṛtarāṣṭra who invited Yudhiṣṭhira for a friendly game of dice (*suhṛddyūta* 2.51.21, 52.8). Before the start of the game Duryodhana suggested that Śakuni would play in his stead (2.53.15-16). Yudhiṣṭhira had thus to play with Śakuni not because he challenged him but because that was the arrangement suggested by Duryodhana. Yudhiṣṭhira in fact had declared that he would not challenge any one for the game but, if challenged, he would not refuse (2.52.16; 2.53.13). The compulsion of the game was thus not Yudhiṣṭhira's excessive fondness for it but the invitation received by him from the Kauravas. The only point in which the two accounts agree is that Yudhiṣṭhira did not retire from the game at any stage.

The above account of Balarāma is not only confirmed but also reinforced by Yudhiṣṭhira's own admission which is found in the Āraṇyakaparvan. A repentant Yudhiṣṭhira one evening (3. 28. 1) admitted to his brothers and to Draupadī his fault. He began by admitting that it was on account of his improper conduct that calamity had overtaken them all (*mamānayād dhi vyasanam va āgāt* 3. 35. 1). He explained the *anaya* by adding : " I myself proposed a game of dice and challenged Duryodhana in order to deprive him of his kingdom with all its countries (*aham hy akṣān anvapadyam jihīṣan rājyaṁ sarāṣṭram dhṛtarāṣṭrasya putrāt* 3. 35. 2). At that time Śakuni came forward to play for Duryodhana. Seeing that the number of dice at each game turned out to be exactly as desired by Śakuni, I could have controlled myself. But fury deprives a man of his calmness (*akṣān hi dṛṣtvā śakuner yathāvat kāmānulomān ayujo 'yujaś ca / śakyam niyantum abhaviṣyad ātmā manyus tu hanti puruṣasya dhairyam* 3. 35. 4).

Yudhiṣṭhira's confession agrees with the account of Balarāma in all respects except that according to Yudhiṣṭhira he did not directly challenge Śakuni. It is implied that he challenged Duryodhana, but since Śakuni stepped forward to play in place of Duryodhana he had to play with him. Yudhiṣṭhira, in addition, gave the reason why he wanted to play the game and this, of course, Balarāma could not have known. The reason given by Yudhiṣṭhira is unbelievable for any reader of Vaiśampāyana's version of the epic. No one can

entertain even for a moment the idea that Yudhiṣṭhira wanted to deprive Duryodhana of his kingdom. On the other hand, following Vaiśampāyana's version, any reader knows that it was Duryodhana who, out of jealousy for the vast wealth accumulated by the Pāṇḍavas, wished to deprive them of their riches. Śakuni suggested to him the game of dice for this purpose and the game was played.

The stanzas of Balarāma in the Udyogaparvan (5. 2. 9-11) and those of Yudhiṣṭhira in the Āraṇyakaparvan (3. 35. 2-4) have therefore to be judged as borrowed from some other version of the epic poem. They do not appear to be such as were invented by some narrator and interpolated into his text.

We now come to an instance of an interpolation, which could be an innovation of some narrator of the poem. It need not be a case of borrowing from another version.

Dhṛtarāṣṭra asked Saṁjaya : who struck first, my warriors or those of the Pāṇḍavas? (6. 22. 18). The account of the war then should have followed. But the *Gītā* intervenes, and at the end of it Arjuna became ready to fight (6. 23-6. 40). Now at least with the next *adhyāya* (41) the war description should have begun. But again it does not. It begins actually with *adhyāya* 42. The intervening *adhyāya* 41 reports a very strange and most ridiculous incident.

Just when the first arrow was about to be shot Yudhiṣṭhira, we are told, got down from his chariot, dropped his armour and weapons and, with folded hands, started on foot towards the chariot of Bhīṣma. The rest of the Pāṇḍavas, confounded, and Kṛṣṇa followed suit. Many other kings did the same. the Pāṇḍavas asked Yudhiṣṭhira the meaning of his curious behaviour, but he would not reply. Kṛṣṇa, then, told them that Yudhiṣṭhira was proceeding to Bhīṣma, Droṇa and other elders on the opposite side to seek their permission to fight.<sup>33</sup> Yudhiṣṭhira did go to Bhīṣma and sought his permission. He did not stop there. When he was granted a boon by Bhīṣma, Yudhiṣṭhira asked him how the Pāṇḍavas could defeat him. This he asked within the hearing of all those who could listen to the conversation. Saṁjaya too could

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33 In justification to Yudhiṣṭhira's behaviour Kṛṣṇa said that if a person went to battle without taking permission of the elders he was despised by them (6. 41. 18-19). But this should surely be applicable to the elders on one's own side and not to those on the opposite side and that too on the battlefield just before the start of the war!



listen to it to report it later to Dhṛtarāṣṭra. Bhīṣma hesitated to reveal immediately the secret of his defeat but promised to do that later.<sup>34</sup> Yudhiṣṭhira next approached Droṇa. Everything happened exactly as before, the only difference was that in the case of Droṇa, Yudhiṣṭhira did not just ask how to defeat him, but went a step further and asked how to kill him (*vadhopāyaṁ vadātmanah* 6. 41. 58). Droṇa did not hesitate like Bhīṣma and straightaway told him that any one could kill him once he had laid down the arms after learning some extremely bad news from a person whom he could trust (*śastraṁ cāhaṁ raṇe jahyāṁ śrutvā sumahad apriyam / śraddheyavākyāt puruṣād etat satyaṁ bravīmi te* 6. 4. 61).<sup>35</sup> When Yudhiṣṭhira next met Kṛpa, after completing the initial formalities, he did not ask him either how to defeat him or how to kill him. He just kept quiet. Kṛpa, who in all probability had heard what had happened in Yudhiṣṭhira's earlier meetings with Bhīṣma and Droṇa, told him without his asking that he could never be killed (*avadhyo 'haṁ mahīpāla* 6. 41. 69). The meeting ended there, and Yudhiṣṭhira approached Śalya. He requested Śalya that later in the war when he would become the charioteer of Karna he should lower Karna's spirits (*sūtaputrasya saṁgrāme kāryo tajovadhas tvayā* 6.41.81). After getting this assurance from Śalya, Yudhiṣṭhira returned to his side.

This long episode of seventy-eight stanzas (6. 41. 6-83) is clearly of a secondary nature. Its spurious nature is revealed by the fact that it shows advance knowledge on the part of the inventor of events which took place later during the war. Everything happens later exactly as foreseen here. The incident is also intrinsically improbable. It is impossible to believe that Yudhiṣṭhira put such questions and make request to the leaders of the opponents on the battlefield. The replies given and the request agreed to by the leaders amount to treason. It is surprising that Duryodhana did not object immediately to what had happened. Later during the war, Duryodhana is occasionally seen finding fault with Bhīṣma and Droṇa for not fighting seriously with the Pāṇḍavas, but he never utters a word of reproach about their objectionable behaviour as reported in the above episode.

The four episodes, detailed above, although they form part of the constituted text since they occur in all versions alike, are of spurious nature.

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<sup>34</sup> And this he did on the night of the ninth day of the war (6. 103. 50-82).

<sup>35</sup> The only thing that remained to be asked by Yudhiṣṭhira was the exact nature of 'the extremely bad news' which would lead Droṇa to lay down arms.

The first three are not compatible with the information found elsewhere in the epic and the fourth is intrinsically improbable. Whereas the first and the fourth could be easily looked upon as additions made by the narrators themselves, the second and the third are more likely to be borrowings from some other version of the epic not otherwise known to us.